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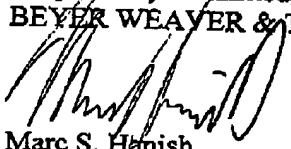
REMARKS

The Examiner rejected claims 1-12, 14-21 under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being anticipated by Benedict et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,321,812).

Claims 1-12 and 14-21 have been canceled. New claims 22-44 have been added. It is respectfully submitted that Benedict neither teaches nor suggests the elements of these claims. For example, with reference to claims 22-28, 33-39, and 44, Benedict relies on a specific one of the nodes in the network (the "local node" as described in Col. 6, lines 20-29), which sends out its name in a loop detection packet and examines incoming packets to determine if it receives one with its name. This process is only performed when the local node has acquired a new focal point or server node. This, however, fails to teach or suggest "determining, at the first node, whether the identification included in the communication is closer to, equidistant from, or further from a predetermined value than an identification associated with the first node." As another example, with reference to claims 29-32 and 40-43, Benedict fails to teach or suggest "sending a loop detect message from a first device to a second device in the network of devices, wherein the loop detect message is substantially similar in length to an auto-negotiate message in a protocol supported by the first device and the second device." Indeed no mention of auto-negotiate messages are mentioned anywhere in Benedict.

Applicants believe that all pending claims are allowable and respectfully requests a Notice of Allowance for this application from the Examiner. Should the Examiner believe that a telephone conference would expedite the prosecution of this application, the undersigned can be reached at the telephone number set out below.

Respectfully submitted,  
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